

Daniel, if he took a late train and turned up at ten instead of at nine fifteen, he hardly dared give Miss Brown instructions during the rest of the forenoon.

"Abner," said Daniel one day, "I withdraw what I said against women bookkeepers. Miss Brown is a—er—a—er—peach!"

He hissed the word at his brother and then looked at him as one who has committed a breach of decorum. But Abner only nodded his head, and then Daniel looked at him quite differently. That Abner should hold the same opinion of Miss Brown roused a curious sensation in him.

From that time onward each brother watched the other narrowly when he was talking to Miss Brown.

"Abner," said Daniel, "what would we do if she left us?"

"Left us!" echoed Abner. "Why should she leave us?"

"Well—er—she might get married you know," suggested Daniel.

"I guess we'd better raise her salary, then," replied Abner.

So Miss Brown was duly raised from fifteen to twenty dollars a week, to lure her away from matrimonial aspirations.

But that was in the good times before the panic. Then business grew worse, and, as is always the case, the trade in luxuries was the first to suffer. The business fell off to almost nothing. It became a case of closing the warehouse or selling securities at a price which would have swept away half the brothers' fortune.

"Abner," said Daniel, "Miss Brown will have to go. You give her notice."

"Why don't you give her notice?" answered Abner. "You are the senior partner." He had observed that Daniel had grown much more formal with Miss Brown of late.

"But you are a man of the world, Abner," urged Daniel. "You have had—er—experience in these matters. Tell her, Abner, that we may take her back if we re-open."

"Take her back!" repeated Abner,

scornfully. "Why, Daniel, she will have another position then. How could we get her back?"

"But nobody except Miss Brown could understand our system," lamented Daniel. "We should have to train a new bookkeeper, and all he would think about would be moving picture shows and horse racing. Abner, you tell Miss Brown."

So Abner very reluctantly edged his way toward the grille.

"Miss Brown," he began, "I am very sorry to say that I—that is, the firm—I mean we are going to close down, perhaps for a long time."

As he looked at Miss Marjory Brown Abner became suddenly aware that for the first time in months he was able to do so without Daniel coming in to call him. Daniel had always hated to have him talk to the bookkeeper. And now he came to think of it, he hated to have Daniel talk to her, too. The chance might never occur again. Miss Brown's hair had auburn tints among its shadowy tresses. Miss Brown's figure was divine. Miss Brown reminded him of somebody he had once known when he really was the reckless member of the family. And suddenly Abner was swept away into doing the most reckless thing that he had ever done.

"But we want you to stay with us for ever," he stammered. "We want you to be—er—er—wife."

Miss Brown's cheeks became the color of a ruddy peach.

"Whose wife did you say, Mr. Abner," she murmured, looking down at her ledger.

"My wife!" ejaculated Abner, taking the ledger brazenly away.

"I knew you couldn't mean Mr. Daniel's wife," murmured Miss Brown five minutes later.

"Why, dearest?" inquired Abner.

"Because I refused him two months ago," answered Miss Brown.

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Christmas was first celebrated as a religious festival about 190 A. D.